

MINIATURE LED FLASHLIGHT

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part application SN 09/851,685, filed May 8, 2001 and of SN 09/653,646, filed September 1, 2000, which is a continuation application of SN 09/226,322, filed January 6, 1999, now U.S. Patent No. 6,190,018, issued February 20, 2001.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

1. Field of Invention

This invention is directed generally to flashlights, and more particularly to a miniature flashlight using a light emitting diode ("LED") as a light source that is useful for law enforcement personnel and civilians alike.

2. Background of the Invention

Conventional general purpose flashlights are well known in the prior art and have often been used by law enforcement personnel in the execution of their duties and by them and civilians in emergency situations. Flashlights are used for a wide variety of purposes. For example, they are often used during traffic stops to illuminate the interior of a stopped vehicle or to complete a police report in the dark. They are also used to facilitate searches of poorly lit areas and may be used to illuminate dark alleys or stairwells. Also, they are used to check or adjust equipment when positioned in a darkened area or at night time, and can be used to send coded signals to one another. Generally, small incandescent lightbulbs and LED flashlights were not dependable when needed.

However, the size and weight of conventional flashlights add to the inconvenience and reduce the mobility of law enforcement personnel required to carry such flashlights along with the other law enforcement equipment. Sometimes the flashlight is purposefully or inadvertently left behind. This presents a problem when the need for a flashlight arises and the flashlight is not located on the person, or otherwise readily available. In addition to the use of flashlights by law enforcement personnel, civilians also use flashlights for a number of different reasons. Besides the traditional, home uses of flashlights, smaller flashlights are used in today's society for various security purposes. For example, when going to one's car late in the evening, it is not uncommon for an individual, especially a female, to carry a small flashlight with her. She can use the flashlight to assist in getting the key in the keyhole in the dark. Additionally, she can use the flashlight to check whether someone is hiding in the back seat before getting into the car. Even small conventional flashlights, however, are generally cumbersome and inconvenient to carry for this purpose.

Thus, there is a need for a compact, lightweight flashlight that may easily be carried on the person of a law enforcement officer or civilian and conveniently attached to one's keychain or carried on one's clothing to help insure that the flashlight remains in possession of the user and can be quickly and easily retrieved and removed when needed.

3. Description of the Prior Art

Although not having been proven useful to law enforcement personnel, there exists in the prior art a small flashlight known as the Photon Micro Light. The Micro Light consists of two flat, circular 3 volt batteries, a light emitting diode ("LED") and an outer shell that encloses the batteries and leads of the LED. The Micro Light uses a slide switch or pressure switch

that activates the light by moving the leads of the LED into direct engagement with the batteries. The outer shell consists of two hard plastic parts opposite either side of the batteries and may be held together with four threaded screws.

The Micro Light, however, has a number of disadvantages. The Micro Light lacks the durability required for a miniature flashlight. It lacks an internal structure for protecting and securing the batteries and LED. Only the hard plastic outer shell protects the internal components of the flashlight. Thus, little protection is provided for the internal components of the flashlight and the Micro Light may be adversely affected when subjected to shock.

The Micro Light operates by using either a slide switch or pressure switch which upon activation brings both the leads of the LED into direct engagement with the batteries. This results in increased fatigue on the leads of the flashlight and undesirable wear that affects the reliability of the switch. Moreover, because of its external shape and hard plastic outer shell construction, the Micro Light is not suitable for receiving markings or engravings on the outside surfaces thereof, cannot have a medallion installed thereon, have a die struck panel, or disclose using a translucent housing. In many instances it is desirable to color code the exterior of the flashlight, or to provide medallions, die struck panels, engravings, markings, or other indicia on the exterior surface. However, the construction of the Micro Light is not well suited or adapted to allow for any such color coding or desired markings or engravings.

4. Summary of the Invention

The subject invention is specifically directed to a small, compact LED flashlight useful to both law enforcement personnel and civilians. One embodiment of the invention may include an LED flashlight wherein the LED has first and second leads extending therefrom; a power

source; a power source frame enclosing at least a portion of the power source; a power source frame housing containing the power source frame, light source and power source; a switch located adjacent the power source and operable to close a circuit including the light source and the power source; a keyring extension extending from the power source frame, said keyring extension having an opening whereby an article can be attached to the keyring extension, and the keyring extension further includes a keyring lock connected to the power source frame or power source frame housing wherein upon exerting a force against the keyring lock, the keyring lock is opened to permit the article to be attached to the keyring extension.

The power source frame is non-conductive and has a cavity adapted to house the power source. The power source frame may also have a receptacle for receiving and housing a connector end of the light source. The power source frame therefore serves as a fitted compartment for holding in place and protecting the various internal components of the flashlight. The power source frame provides significant protection to the power source and the light source and serves to cushion these elements from the adverse affects of any shock the flashlight might receive. The power source frame housing encases the power source frame, and provides further protection to the internal components of the flashlight, in addition to that provided by the power source frame. The power source frame housing thus serves to provide an additional level of protection to the light source and the power source and enhances the durability of the flashlight.

Another embodiment of the invention may include an LED flashlight wherein the LED has first and second leads extending therefrom; a power source having a first side and a second

side, the second side being opposite the first side; a housing enclosing the leads of the LED and the power source, wherein the housing is comprised of translucent material; and a switch operable to close a circuit including the LED and the power source.

Still a further embodiment of the invention may include an LED flashlight wherein the LED has first and second leads extending therefrom; a power source; a housing containing the LED and the power source; the housing includes at least one side cover which is not integral with the housing; the at least one side cover being selected from anodized metal, anodized metal which includes indicia, die struck metal, laser engraved metal, and a side cover having a separate medallion attached thereto; and a switch located adjacent the power source and operable to close a circuit including the light source and the power source.

The LED is preferably an LED that has a high luminous intensity. Manufacturers of LEDs grade the LED according to its quality. The highest quality LEDs are given an "E" grade. The next highest quality is a "D" grade. LEDs with a "D" grade can be equipped with a lens to approximate the quality of an "E" grade LED. LEDs of this quality were initially used in medical applications and are sometimes referred to as having medical grade application. Although the flashlight of the present invention can be used with any conventional LED, in a preferred embodiment, the light source is an "E" grade LED or lensed "D" grade LED. Such a high intensity LED may be obtained from Hiyoshi Electric, Co., Ltd. located in Tokyo, Japan, having Part No. E1L533BL. The high intensity LED herein described has from three to five times the luminous intensity of a conventional LED. The LED preferably emits blue light, although the present invention may be used with any color LED. Blue light helps to preserve a user's night vision compared with conventional flashlights emitting white light. For other applications bluegreen LEDs can be used, for example, in situations where

compatibility with night vision equipment is desired. Other colored LEDs can also be used. Red LEDs can be used in applications where the preservation of night vision is desired or for use with pilots and photographers, and even infrared LEDs can be used where certain signalling capabilities are required or for use with equipment that senses infrared light. The LED includes first and second leads extending from a connector end of the LED. The LED leads may be provided with extensions that can be soldered onto the leads of the LED.

The power source may be any battery having sufficient power to energize an LED. The power source is preferably round and has oppositely disposed generally flat sides, sometimes referred to as coin cells. A pair of stacked 3volt batteries of this type may be used as the power source. Three-volt lithium batteries are preferably used to provide for longer life, and greater shelf life.

The power source frame may be made of nonconductive plastic and preferably has generally flat oppositely disposed first and second sides. The power source frame may be adapted to receive and house a power source, and includes a power source cavity for this purpose. The power source frame also includes a receptacle at a front end to receive and house a connector end of an LED. The leads of the LED are preferably positioned so that one lead extends over the first side of the power source and another lead extends over the second side of the power source. The power source frame protects and secures the internal components of the flashlight. The power source frame also provides resistance to shock and safeguards the light source and power, source within its frame. The power source frame may include a power source cavity cover that serves to further enclose the power source, and may include a bottom support beneath the cavity for further supporting the power source.

A switch element is preferably located on the side opposite of the power source cavity. The side of the power frame opposite the side having the power source cavity may include a counterbore having a terminus in the power source frame that houses a switch element. The counterbore may be included in the power source cavity cover as well. The switch element is preferably a dome plate that is located between one of the leads of the LED and the power source, but out of contact with the power source. The dome plate is sometimes referred to as a tactile dome plate or a snap dome plate. The switch is activated by applying pressure to the dome plate, thereby completing a circuit that includes the leads of the LED and the power source. With this switch arrangement, a switch button is depressed forcing one lead of the LED into contact with the dome plate which in turn contacts the power source. Thus, in this embodiment, one lead of the LED never comes into direct contact with the power source. Once pressure is removed from the button, the contact between the dome plate and power source is broken and the flashlight returns to its normal "off" position. Thus, the switching arrangement reduces the wear on the leads of the LED and increases the overall reliability.

The power source frame may be adapted to receive a weight, which is preferably round and has opposite ends coplanar with the opposite sides of the power source frame. The weight may be press fit into a cavity or tapered hole in the power source frame specifically adapted to receive the weight. The weight provides for a heavier flashlight and improved balance. In addition, the weight provides the flashlight with greater substance and as a result a higher perceived value in the hands of the user. With the additional weight added to the flashlight, the flashlight appears more substantial and of a higher quality than a lighter weight flashlight.

The power source frame housing is preferably of a two piece construction, with each piece disposed on either side of the power source frame. The power source frame housing includes a first housing side disposed about the first side of the power source frame and a second housing side disposed about the second side of the power source frame, the two sides conforming to the periphery of the power source frame. The housing is preferably constructed of plastic. In one embodiment, the housing may be translucent. In this manner, the light from the LED may be dispersed throughout the housing to effectively illuminate the light. In one embodiment, the entire housing may be translucent. It may also be colored to match the color of the LED. For example, a red translucent housing may be used with a red LED, a blue translucent housing may be used with a blue LED, etc.

The power source frame may have a plurality of pegholes located about the periphery of either side thereof. In addition, the first and second housing sides of the power source frame housing may be provided with a plurality of pegs extending from an inner periphery thereof. The pegs are positioned to engage in a mating relationship with the plurality of pegholes located about the periphery of the sides of the power source frame such that the housing sides can be engaged with the power source frame. The mating of the pegs and the pegholes facilitates assembly of the flashlight by allowing the parts to be precisely aligned during their assembly. It has been found that gluing the power source frame housing to the power source frame provides for a suitable adhesion of the parts. Alternately, ultrasonic welding can be used to attach the parts. Unlike the prior art, separate screws are not needed to attach the parts of the flashlight together and thus assembly is facilitated. In this manner, the housing sides may include notches that mate with corresponding notch receptacles on the power source

frame. The housing sides may thus be advantageously ultrasonically welded to the power source frame.

The flashlight housing may be provided with at least one separate side cover and preferably be provided with first and second side covers that are positioned between the first and second housing sides of the power source frame housing and with the housing sides sandwiches the power source frame. The side covers preferably lie in parallel planes and may have flat outer surfaces that are capable of receiving engravings or markings. It is often desirable to engrave or imprint the side covers with surface indicia. For example, a company logo or name of a product could be located on either of the side covers. The use of engraving or printing on the side covers can be used for promotional or advertising purposes. In addition, a flashlight bearing certain markings on the side covers could serve as a prize or be used to commemorate an important event. In one embodiment, a die struck medallion could be inset in the side cover.

The side covers can be made of a variety of materials, such as metal, plastic, or other protective materials. The side covers are preferably made of anodized aluminum. Aluminum provides the desired strength to the side covers and is easily anodized aluminum engraved or imprinted. Indicia may be laser engraved, silk screened, inked, pad printed, or marked in any known manner. In the embodiment where the housing is translucent, the side covers may also be made of a translucent plastic material, or they may be made of non-translucent plastic or metal. Thus, a flashlight may be provided with a translucent housing, and translucent side covers, or a translucent housing and opaque side covers. Where both the housing and side covers are translucent, they may of different colors, to present a two, or even three, tone

flashlight. Further, the flashlight may include a translucent power source frame as well. Where translucent side covers are used, indicia may be engraved or printed on the inside surface of the side cover. Thus, the side cover protects the indicia from being marred by normal wear and tear, and also by virtue of being translucent, may provide an attractive gloss finish highlighting the indicia.

In another embodiment, the side covers are a die struck, or coined metal, preferably brass, in which physical indicia may be formed in the metal side cover. Most preferably, both sides of a side cover are struck to provide finer detail in the physical indicia, which may include a company logo, name, or other suitable information.

In another embodiment, a side cover can have a medallion therein. One way of doing this is to cut a hole the size of the medallion in the side cover. An appropriate support and single faced adhesive is attached to the inside of the side cover so that the adhesive can be used to attach the medallion too the side cover.

The side covers provide additional protection to the internal components of the flashlight. The sturdy aluminum construction serves to guard the light source and power source from external forces. Moreover, there is an insulated pocket located between the power source frame and the side covers that provides an air cushion that serves to further protect the light source and power source within the power source frame housing. The side covers may be manufactured as separate components of the flashlight from the power source frame housing. Thus, side covers of varying colors may used to assemble flashlights of varying and contrasting colors. For example, flashlights having side covers bearing corporate colors can

be easily assembled. Similarly, flashlights having side covers bearing the colors of a favorite team can be provided. For example, a flashlight having a green side cover on one side and a yellow side cover on the other side could be used to represent the colors of the Green Bay Packers. In addition, a Green Bay Packers logo could be included on one or both side covers of the flashlight.

One of the side covers is adapted to receive a switch button that is secured to the side cover. The button may be made of rubber, and is preferably made of Kraton, the trade name of a thermoplastic rubber made by the Shell Oil Company, and located adjacent the power source. When the button is pushed, a circuit including the leads of the LED and the power source is completed.

The power source frame or power source frame housing may be provided with a keyring extension. The keyring extension may directly extend from the housing or power source frame. The keyring extension includes a keyring lock that opens and closes the keyring extension when a force is exerted against the keyring lock. The keyring extension is opened to permit an item such as a keyring to be attached to the keyring extension. The keyring lock is preferably springbiased and may be attached to the power source frame. The keyring lock may pivot about a circular post positioned on the power source frame. Alternatively, the keyring lock may extend from the interior of the housing, or if a power source frame is used, extend from the power source frame. The keyring extension may be easily attached and detached from any number of items, such as the zipper of a coat or backpack, the handle of a purse or briefcase, a beltloop, or any other handle or case.

The flashlight of the present invention is small, compact and easy to operate. The flashlight may easily be carried in the pocket, on the clothing, or on the keychain of law enforcement personnel or civilians. The flashlight may also be quickly and easily retrieved and operated.

In another embodiment of the invention, a magnet may be provided on the flashlight. It may be internal, external, or coextensive with the housing sides or side covers. Preferably, the magnet is internally positioned within the flashlight. It may be positioned within the interior of the housing, or if a power source frame is used may be positioned on the power source frame or within a cavity on the power source frame. An internal magnet allows for indicia to be marked, printed, or engraved on the housing or side covers of the flashlight. When internally positioned, the magnet is protected from chipping or scratching that could occur if the magnet were externally mounted to the flashlight. Moreover, the magnet itself does not scratch the surface to which it may be mounted as the magnet is protected by the housing or side covers. The magnet may be of sufficient strength to allow the flashlight to be mounted to metal objects. In a preferred embodiment using a magnet, the magnet is of sufficient strength to allow the magnet to attach to metal objects even when using side covers that are made of aluminum or other metals.

It will be understood by those of skill in the art that the various aspects of the disclosed embodiments may be used alone or in connection with the other aspects of the disclosed embodiments. For example, the various disclosed keyring extensions may be used with a housing, with a power source frame and power source frame housing together, with or without side covers, with a translucent housing, with a magnet, etc.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Further advantages of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art with the benefit of the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments and upon reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the flashlight of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a side view of the flashlight depicted in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a side view of a first side of the power source frame.

FIG. 4 is a side view of a second side of the power source frame opposite the first side.

FIG. 5 is a side view of a power source consisting of two circular batteries having generally flat sides.

FIG. 6 is a side view of a light emitting diode (LED).

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of a weight.

FIG. 8 is a side view of a first side of the power source frame including a power source, an LED, a keyring lock, and a spring.

FIG. 9 is a side view of a second side of the power source frame including an LED, a weight, a keyring lock, a spring, and a switch element.

FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view of the power source frame of FIG. 4 taken along plane 11.

FIG. 11 is a side view of the exterior of a first side of the power source frame housing.

FIG. 12 is a side view of the interior of a first side of the power source frame housing.

FIG. 13 is a side view of the exterior of a second side of the power source frame housing.

FIG. 14 is a side view of the interior of a second side of the power source frame housing.

FIG. 15 is a side view of a first side cover.

FIG. 16 is a side view of a second side cover.

FIG. 17 is a cross-sectional view of a switch button.

FIG. 18 is a partial cross-sectional view of the flashlight of FIG. 2 taken along the plane 22.

FIG. 19 is a side view of an alternate embodiment of the power source frame.

FIG. 20 is the opposite side view of the power source frame shown in FIG. 19.

FIG. 21 is a side view of a power source cavity cover.

FIG. 22 is an opposite side view of the power source cavity cover shown in FIG. 21.

FIG. 23 is a perspective view showing the power source cavity cover of FIGS. 21 and 22 used in connection with the power source frame of FIGS 19 and 20.

FIG. 24 is atop view of an alternate embodiment of a keyring extension and keyring lock in a connecting relationship.

FIG. 25 is a top view of the keyring lock of FIG. 24.

FIG. 26a is a top view of another alternate embodiment of a keyring lock showing a latch receptacle in dotted lines.

FIG. 26b is a bottom view of the keyring lock of FIG. 26a.

FIG. 27 is a side view of an alternate embodiment of a power source frame having a cavity for a magnet.

FIG. 28 is an opposite view of the power source frame of FIG. 27.

FIG. 29 is a view of the power source frame of FIG. 28 along line 2929 showing a magnet and magnet cavity in dotted lines.

FIG. 30 is side view of an alternate embodiment of the present invention showing a flashlight with a translucent housing.

FIG. 31 is an opposite side view of the flashlight of FIG. 30.

FIG. 32 is a side view of a flashlight having an alternate embodiment of a keyring lock.

FIG. 33 is a side view of the inside of a die struck cover according to the present invention.

FIG. 34 is a side view of the outside of the die struck panel of FIG. 33.

FIG. 35 is a front side view of a cover having a medallion pocket.

FIG. 36 is FIG. 35 with the medallion in the pocket.

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof are shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the drawings and detailed description thereof are not intended to limit the invention to the particular form disclosed, but on the contrary, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A handheld flashlight 10 made in accordance with the principles of the subject invention is depicted in Figures 118. As shown in Figure 2, flashlight 10 preferably includes a side cover 12, a power source frame housing 14, a keyring extension 16, a keyring lock 80, a switch button 18, and a light source 20, extending from a front end of the flashlight.

As depicted in Figures 3 and 4, the flashlight of the subject invention further includes a power source frame 22. The power source frame 22 has oppositely disposed first and second sides 26, 33 that are generally flat and lie in parallel planes. The power source frame 22 further includes a cavity 24 located on the first side 26 of the power source frame adapted to receive a power source, such as that depicted in Figure 5. The frame 22 also is provided with a receptacle 28 at a front end 30 thereof, adapted to receive a light source, such as that depicted in Figure 6. The first side 26 further includes a light source lead channel 29 extending from receptacle 28 to cavity 24 to allow a lead from the light source 20 to extend over cavity 24.

As depicted in Figure 3, the power source frame 22 may also include an area 32 adapted to receive a weight. In the embodiment shown in the figures, although not required, the area 32 is a throughhole extending from the first side 22 of the frame to the second side 33 of the frame. Area 32 is tapered at a slight angle to allow the weight to be friction fit within area 32. The power source frame 22 is further provided with a plurality of pegholes 100 positioned about an outer periphery of the first side 26 of the power source frame. The pegholes 100 are adapted to receive a corresponding set of pegs located on the power source frame housing 14. The mating of the pegs with the pegholes positions the power source frame housing 14 in proper alignment with the power source frame 22. The power source frame housing may be ultrasonically welded to the power source frame and/or glued thereto. Thus, there is no need to use threaded screws or other fastening means to hold the frame and the housing together. As a result, the flashlight of the invention is assembled without difficulty.

The power source frame 22 is preferably made of a nonconductive material. Preferably, the power source frame 22 is comprised of Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene "ABS" which provides for exceptional durability and toughness. However, any nonconductive material may be employed to construct the frame 22. Polycarbonate is preferred where the power source frame is translucent.

Figure 4 depicts a side view of the second side 33 of power source frame 22. The second side 33 is provided with a counterbore 34 having a terminus 36 within the power source frame 22. As shown in Figure 4, the counterbore 34 is adapted to receive a switch element. The counterbore 34 is preferably located opposite the power source cavity 24 and includes a throughhole 38 extending into cavity 24 that is located on the first side 26 of the power source frame 22.

As with the first side 26, the second side 33 preferably includes a light source lead channel 39 extending from receptacle 28 to counterbore 34 to allow a lead from the light source 20 to extend over counterbore 34. The second side 33 of power source frame 22 may preferably further include a post 40 about which an element of the keyring lock 80 may pivot. Power source frame 22 is also provided with a hub 42 located on a rear side 44 of the frame 20 that is adapted to secure one end of a spring element associated with the keyring lock 80. As with the first side, the second side 33 of the power source frame may be provided with a plurality of pegholes 110 positioned about its outer periphery to mate with a corresponding set of pegs located on the power source frame housing 14.

The power source may be any type of battery with sufficient power to energize the light source. As shown in Figure 5, the power source is preferably one or more circular batteries 50 having generally flat oppositely disposed first and second sides 52 and 54. In a preferred embodiment, the power source consists of two 3volt lithium coin cell batteries available from Panasonic bearing the CR2016 marking. These lithium batteries provide for exceptionally long life and durability. In addition, they operate at a low temperature, are leakproof, and vibration resistant.

The light emitting diode light source may be of any type suitable for flashlight use. As shown in Figure 6, the light emitting diode ("LED") 60 has first and second leads 62 and 64 extending therefrom. An LED provides great advantages over conventional neon or incandescent light sources, since it requires much less energy, is smaller in size, and more resistant to shock than conventional light sources. It also generates less heat and is more durable than a conventional light source. LEDs are widely available, inexpensive, and can be replaced easily and quickly. In a preferred embodiment, the light source is a high intensity

LED having a high luminous intensity emitting blue light. The LED may be a "E" grade LED or a lensed "D" grade LED.

The flashlight may include a weight 70 positioned in area 32 on the power frame housing 14. The weight provides for a heavier flashlight and for improved balance. It also provides a more substantial feel to the flashlight resulting in a higher perceived value. In a preferred embodiment shown in Figure 7, the weight 70 has a cylindrical shape and has oppositely disposed first and second faces that are generally flat and lie in parallel planes. The weight 70 preferably has a thickness equal to the thickness of the power source frame 14. It is preferably made of a dense metal material, preferably stainless steel, and preferably weighs approximately eleven grams. The weight is friction fit or press fit into the corresponding portion of the power source frame housing.

Figure 8 is a side view of the first side 26 of the power source frame 22 and depicts power source 50, LED 60, keyring lock 80, and spring 82. The power source frame 22 preferably has a thickness in the range of approximately 0.15 and 0.25 inch, and preferably 0.18 inches, which is approximately equal to the diameter of LED 60. As shown in Figure 8, the LED 60 is positioned in receptacle 28 of the power source frame 22, and the power source 50 is positioned in the cavity 24 of the power source frame 22.

A first lead 62 of the LED 60 preferably extends over the first side 52 of the power source 50, which is preferably coplanar with the first side 26 of the power source frame 22. A lead extension 75 may be attached to the first lead 62 of the LED to extend the length of the lead. The lead extension 75 may be soldered to the first lead 62. The weight 70 may be positioned

within the power source frame 22, and preferably has a first side 72 that is coplanar with the first side 26 of the power source frame. The weight 70 is preferably press fit or friction fit within the power source frame 22.

Figure 9 is a side view of the second side 33 of the power source frame 22 and depicts LED 60, weight 70, keyring lock 80, spring 82 and switch element 90. As shown in Figure 9, the switch element 90 is positioned in the counterbore 34. The switch element 90 has an outer periphery that contacts the terminus 36 of the counterbore 34, but is out of contact with the power source 50. The second lead 64 of LED 60 preferably extends over the switch element 90. A lead extension may be attached to the second lead 64, as required.

The switch element 90 is preferably a dome plate 92 or a convex conductor that is positioned in the counterbore 34, but out of contact with the power source 50. The dome plate is preferably made of a thin, flexible conductive metal stamping. The lead 64 of the LED contacts the dome plate. To ensure contact, the lead may be taped to the dome plate using, for example, 1.5 millimeter thick tape manufactured by 3M. The dome plate preferably has an engaging element 91 located at the center of its inner surface.

When pressure is applied to the dome plate, the dome plate flexes from a convex to a concave configuration, thereby completing the circuit through the first and second leads of the LED, the engaging element of the dome plate, and the power source. When the pressure is removed, the dome plate returns to its convex position breaking contact with the power source and returning the flashlight to its normal "off" position. In this manner, the lead does not come into direct contact with the power source. It should be noted that a number of

alternative push button switch arrangements could be used. For example, the power source frame could include a flexible tongue adjacent to the power source. A lead of the LED could be wrapped around the tongue such that depression of the tongue would bring the lead of the LED into contact with another switch element or into direct contact with the power source to complete the circuit. Alternatively, the lead of the LED could be connected to a flexible tongue having a split metal eyelet adjacent the power source, such that depression of the tongue would complete the circuit. In addition, a number of other mechanical or electrical switches could be utilized, such as slide switches and pressure switches.

As shown in Figure 9, the keyring lock 80 includes hub 84 operatively connected to a coil spring 82 which is in turn operatively connected to hub 42 of power source frame 22. It should be understood that many types of springs can be used to bias the keyring lock including coil springs, leaf springs, and U-shaped or plastic springs to name a few. The coil spring may be a separate component, or may be made integral with the power source frame. Spring 82 exerts a force to bias keyring lock 80 to pivot outwardly and about post 40. The keyring lock 80 is preferably adapted to pivot about post 40 for only a limited distance. Keyring lock 80 further includes a stop 86 that abuts the power source frame 22 to limit the travel of the keyring lock 80. Preferably, the stop 86 prevents an outer edge 88 of the keyring lock to travel beyond the position where the edge 88 is parallel to an edge 89 of the power source frame. Other keyring locking mechanisms could be used having other forms of springs or resistance to bias the keyring lock. Alternately, the keyring lock could be externally or internally hinged.

The keyring extension 16 and keyring lock 80 of the present invention provide a user with significant versatility in attaching the flashlight to the user's person. For example, the keyring lock 80 may be moved to its open position to allow the flashlight to be easily attached to the zipper of a coat or backpack, the handle of a purse or briefcase, a beltloop, or any other handle or case. In addition, because the keyring lock 80 is normally biased into its closed position, the keyring extension and keyring lock 80 can serve as a clip to easily fasten the flashlight to a shirt pocket or directly to one's clothing. In this manner the shirt pocket or portion of clothing is pinched between an outer end 134 of keyring lock 80 and an outer end 132 of keyring extension 16. (See Figure 2). The ability to easily clip the flashlight to one's clothing provides the user with great flexibility in carrying the flashlight on one's person.

Figure 10 is a cross-sectional view of the power source frame 22 of Figure 4 taken along line 11. Cavity 24 on side 26 preferably has a depth equal to the thickness of the power source 50 and encloses all but an outer surface of the power source. Counterbore 34 on side 33 is located opposite the cavity 24 and has a terminus 36 in the power source frame and throughhole 38 extending therethrough into cavity 24. The diameter of the counterbore 34 is preferably slightly larger than throughhole 38.

Figures 3-10 depict the inner workings of an embodiment of the present invention. However, the invention is not intended to be limited by the particular geometry, locations, and components depicted herein, which are illustrative.

Figure 11 is a side view of the exterior of a first housing side 150 of the power source frame housing 14 depicted in Figure 1. First housing side 150 is adapted to fit over and enclose the first side 26 of the power source frame 22.

Figure 12 is a side view of the interior 156 of first housing side 150. A plurality of pegs 158 are preferably positioned about an inner periphery of the first housing side 150. As mentioned above, the pegs 158 are adapted to engage in a mating relationship a corresponding plurality of pegholes 100 located on an outer periphery of the first side 26 of the power source frame 22.

Figure 13 is a side view of an exterior 142 of a second housing side 140 of power source frame housing 14 depicted in Figure 2. The second housing side 140 is adapted to fit over and enclose the second side 33 of the power source frame 22. With reference to Figures 2 and 13, the exterior 142 includes a keyring extension 16 extending from a rear side 144 thereof. An outer end 132 of keyring extension 16 engages an outer end 134 of keyring lock 80 (as shown in Figure 2). Alternatively, the keyring extension could be attached to, or integral with, the power source frame, such that the power source frame housing could fit over and enclose the power source frame, except for the keyring extension. In such an alternate embodiment, the second housing side 140 will be identical to the first housing side 150, shown in Figure 12.

Figure 14 is a side view of an interior 146 of second housing side 140. A plurality of pegs 148 are preferably positioned about an inner periphery of second housing side 140. The pegs 148 are adapted to engage in a mating relationship a corresponding plurality of pegholes 110 located on an outer periphery of the second side 33 of the power source frame 22.

Figures 11-14 show first and second power source frame housing sides having an opening therein to accommodate the side covers shown in Figures 15 and 16. It should be understood, however, that the power source frame housing sides are not limited to accommodating the particular side covers shown in Figures 15 and 16. They could be modified to be used with side covers of any geometry. In addition, the housing sides could be made without any openings and used without side covers, such that the power source frame housing sides would completely enclose the power source frame housing. Also, the power source frame housing can be made from any suitable material, and is preferably strong and durable. In a preferred embodiment, the power source frame housing is made of ABS.

Figures 15 and 16 are side views of first and second side covers 160 and 170. The first and second side covers are preferably positioned between the power source frame 22 and the power source frame housing 14. First and second side covers 160 and 170 are generally flat and adapted to conform to the outer surfaces of the power source frame 22 such that the side covers preferably lie in parallel planes when positioned between the power source frame 22 and the power source frame housing 14. The power source frame housing 14 conceals the edges of the side covers when they are positioned between the power source frame 22 and the power source frame housing 14. The side covers may be of any suitable material including metals, rubbers, and plastics. Preferably the side covers are made of stamped aluminum, preferably anodized 6061 aluminum, and have surfaces suitable for marking or engraving. As noted above, it is often desirable to engrave or imprint the side covers with surface indicia. For example, a company logo or name of a product could be located on either of the side covers. The use of engraving or printing on the side covers can be used for promotional or

advertising purposes. In addition, a flashlight bearing certain markings on the side covers could serve as a prize or be used to commemorate an important event.

Figs. 35 and 36 illustrate a die struck medallion 161 inset in one of the side covers 162. A hole 163 is cut in the side cover 162 the size of the medallion 161. The medallion is shown as cylindrical, but could be any shape, i.e., box, oval, etc. A piece of adhesive 164 is placed inside of the cover so that an adhesive portion 165 faces the outside of the side cover and forms a medallion pocket that permits the medallion to be attached to the side cover. Other mechanisms can be used to attach the medallion to the side cover such as adhering a support piece within the side cover to form the base of the medallion pocket and using an appropriate adhesive to attach the medallion to the side cover. Also, although the medallion is generally metal, it can be any suitable material, i.e., plastic.

A further embodiment is shown in FIGS. 33 and 34 wherein the side cover 166 is die struck metal, i.e., brass, aluminum, wherein the entire side cover 166 is die struck metal, i.e., brass, aluminum having the desired depiction 167 (positive), 167a (negative) die struck on both sides 168 and 169 for greater detail. This provides a special flashlight for a designated group of people.

The side covers can be made of a variety of materials, such as metal, plastic, or other protective materials. Generally, the side covers are preferably made of anodized aluminum. Aluminum provides the desired strength to the side covers and is easily engraved or imprinted. Indicia may be laser engraved, silk screened, inked, pad printed, or marked in any known manner.

The side covers are on both sides of the power source frame and are held by the power source frame housing. The side covers provide additional protection to the internal components of the flashlight. The sturdy aluminum construction serves to guard the light source and power source from external forces. Moreover, there is an insulated pocket located between the power source frame and the side covers that provides an air cushion that serves to further protect the light source and power source within the power source frame housing. As noted above, in applications where no side covers are used, it is desirable to similarly provide a spaced pocket of air between the power source and the power source frame housing sides to further protect the light source and power source.

As shown in Figure 15, the second side cover 170 has a hole 172 therethrough adapted to receive a switch button 18 (shown in Figure 17). When the side cover 170 is positioned between the power source frame 22 and the power source frame housing 14, hole 172 is located adjacent the switch element 90. In a preferred embodiment, a thin piece of foam (not shown) is attached to the inner surface of the first side cover 160. When the flashlight is assembled, the piece of foam serves to compress the first lead 62 of the light source 20 into engagement with power source 50. The piece of foam also serves to keep the elements of the power source frame 22 tightly enclosed therein, and prevents the internal components from rattling or making noise when in use.

Figure 17 is a side view of switch button 18. Switch button 18 is preferably circular with a circular recess 182 about its periphery. The recess 182 is adapted to secure the switch button 18 to the second side cover 170. Switch button 18 is preferably made of a resilient material, such as rubber, to allow the button to deform when a force is exerted thereon. In a preferred

embodiment, the switch button 18 is made of Kraton, the trade name of a thermoplastic rubber made by the Shell Oil Company.

The switch button 18 further includes an engaging element 184 on an interior surface thereof. When a force is exerted on the button, the engaging element 184 contacts the switch element 90 located in the power source frame 22. When not engaged, the engaging element 184 is preferably out of contact with the switch element 90.

Figure 18 is a partial cross-sectional view of the flashlight 10 taken along the line 22 of Figure 2. As shown in Figure 18, switch button 18 is secured to second side cover 170, which is positioned between the second housing side 140 of power source frame housing 14 and the power source frame 22. The engaging element 184 of switch button 18 is preferably positioned adjacent to, but out of contact with, dome plate 92. An outer periphery 186 of the interior surface of switch button 18 engages an outer periphery of dome plate 92. As a force is exerted on switch button 18, the engaging element 184 contacts dome plate 92. The dome plate 92 then moves in a direction towards the power source 50 until it comes in contact with power source 50. Once contact is made, a circuit including the leads of the light source 60, the dome plate 92, and the power source 50 is completed.

Typically, a flashlight pressure switch makes noise upon its engagement. With the switch button configuration shown herein, the noise created by the dome plate 92 coming in contact with the power source 50 is muffled because the switch button 18 completely encloses the dome plate 92 in the power source frame. Moreover, a raised annular portion 190 of the power source frame partially encloses the outer diameter of the switch button to further

enclose the switch button and muffle any sound from the operation of the dome plate. In addition, 1.5 millimeter thick 3M tape may be placed over the lead and dome plate to further muffle the sound of the switch operation. In addition, a small notch is placed in the outer periphery 186 of the interior surface of switch button to allow air to escape through the notch when the button is depressed.

Thus, any noise created is muffled within the switch button 18. In addition, with the disclosed switch button configuration, when a force is exerted on the dome plate 92, the user is able to feel the flexure of the dome plate as it moves into contact with the power source 50. Thus, the switch button configuration provides tactile feedback to the user so that the user is able to feel when the dome plate has come into contact with the power source, and when it is released. This tactile feedback is particularly useful where the flashlight is being operated out of the direct sight of the user, and it is not possible to tell by sight whether the flashlight is on or off.

Figures 19-23 depict an alternate embodiment of a miniature LED flashlight. As shown in Figures 19 and 20, power source frame 222 has oppositely disposed first and second sides 226, 233 that are generally flat and lie in parallel planes. The power source frame 222 further includes a cavity 224 located on the second side 233 of the power source frame adapted to receive a power source, such as that depicted in Figure 5. The frame 222 also is provided with a receptacle 228 at a front end 230 thereof, adapted to receive a light source, such as that depicted in Figure 6. The first side 226 further includes a light source lead channel 229 extending to cavity 224 from receptacle 228 to allow a lead from the light source 220 to extend into cavity 224.

As depicted in Figure 20, the power source frame 222 may also include a cavity 232 adapted to receive a weight. In the embodiment shown in the Figures 19 and 20, although not required, the power source cavity 224 and the weight cavity 232 have a bottom support 235 positioned on side 226 of the power source frame 222. The bottom support 235 may be separate from, but is preferably molded integrally with, the power source frame 222. In addition, the bottom support 235 is shown supporting both the power source cavity 224 and the weight cavity 232, but also could be limited to support only one or the other.

As shown in Figures 21 and 22, a power source cavity cover 240 may be used in connection with the power source frame 222 shown in Figures 19 and 20. Power source cavity cover 240 may include pegs 242 that mate in pegholes 244 located on side 233 of power source frame 222. While such pegs are preferred for proper alignment of the power source cavity cover, any number of known conventions, such as notches, tabs, etc. could be used to properly position and secure the power source cavity cover to the power source frame. The power source cavity cover may be provided with a counterbore 250 having a terminus 252 within the power source cavity cover 240. As shown in Figures 21 and 22, the counterbore 250 is adapted to receive a switch element. Preferably, the switch element is a dome plate, such as that shown as element 92 in Figure 18. Of course, other types of flexible switch plates can be suitably used. As shown in Figure 23, when the power source cavity cover 240 is positioned on the power source frame 222, the counterbore 250 is preferably located opposite the power source cavity 224 and includes a throughhole 254 extending into cavity 224 that is located on the side 233 of the power source frame 222.

Referring back to Figures 19 and 20, keyring extension 260 extends from power source frame 222. Keyring extension 260 includes an outer end 262 adapted to engage and connect to an outer end of a keyring lock of the type shown in Figure 2. In an embodiment shown in Figures 24 and 25, the outer end 262 includes a latch 264 that connects to a latch receptacle 266 of the keyring lock 268. This configuration provides for a positive lock between the outer end 262 of the keyring extension 260 and the keyring lock 268. The keyring lock may be attached to the interior of the housing, or to the power source frame, using any suitable means of attachment. Preferably, the keyring lock is springbiased and may pivot about a circular post 270 (shown in Figure 20) in the same manner as shown in Figure 9.

Alternatively, as shown in Figures 26a and 26b, the keyring lock may include a receptacle hood 270 that extends over the receptacle 272, such that the receptacle hood 270 abuts the keyring extension latch 264, thus preventing an over-extension of the keyring lock 268.

Preferably, the keyring extension is made of ABS, Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene, along with the power source frame, although any suitable nonconductive material may be used. The keyring lock is preferably made of a different material, such as nylon, so that it does not become welded to the keyring extension during ultrasonic welding of the power source frame housing sides.

In yet an additional embodiment, shown in Figures 27 through 29, a power source frame 322 may include a magnet cavity 370 positioned in bottom support 335 that is adapted to receive a magnet 372. The magnet attracts both the power source and the weight, if used, to further maintain the placement of the internal components. In the absence of a power source frame, the magnet is preferably positioned within the housing. In a preferred embodiment, the internal magnet 372 is approximately 0.060 inches thick and a half inch in diameter. The

magnet is advantageously made of Neodymium alloyed with iron and boron. Most preferably it is a NEP3042NP Neodymium 30 magnet having a Rockwell C scale hardness of 55 available from Bunting Magnets. It is also preferably nickel plated to protect against corrosion. The magnet weighs only 0.003 pounds and has a holding force of three pounds. The use of an internal magnet allows the outer surfaces of the light to maintain their distinctive smooth lines and allows for engravings or other indicia to be placed on the outer surfaces of the light. With this magnet, the light can be attached to refrigerators, toolboxes, or any metal surface. An adhesive steel disc may be provided that may be mounted on any surface in any location to provide a place to attach the light. For example, the steel disc can be mounted to the interior dashboard of a car to provide a resting place for the light and allow for quick retrieval when needed.

A further alternative embodiment is shown in Figures 30 and 31. This embodiment includes a translucent housing 400. The translucent housing may be made of polycarbonate. The flashlight may be constructed using any of the various embodiments disclosed herein. Preferably it includes a power source frame 410 that may also be made of translucent material. In a preferred embodiment, the flashlight includes a translucent power source frame housing 420 having integral side covers that together completely enclose the power source frame. The housing is preferably made of a colored translucent material that may include a matching colored LED 430. For example, a flashlight having a red colored translucent housing may be used with a red LED. With the translucent housing, the light emitted from the LED is dispersed throughout the housing to provide an illuminated housing. Alternatively, the housing may be provided with separate side covers that are either translucent or opaque. Different colored LEDs may be used with a different colored housing,

as well as different colored side covers to provide a rainbow, or kaleidoscope of colors. Or, if the side covers are opaque, the light is only dispersed throughout the translucent portion of the housing.

In an further alternative embodiment, shown in Figure 32, flashlight 500 may include a keyring extension 510 extending from the housing, or power source frame if used, and may further include a keyring lock 520 extending from the interior of the housing, or the power source frame if used. The keyring lock 520 is preferably springbiased, or most preferably internally hinged, as shown in Figure 32. The keyring lock 520 includes an outer end 530 that is biased towards and abuts an outer end 540 of keyring extension 510. The keyring lock operates to allow a keyring to be slipped between the outer end 530 of the keyring lock and the outer end 540 of the keyring extension 510. This embodiment also may include side covers 550 that are made of santoprene.

While certain features and embodiments of the invention have been described herein, it will be readily understood that the invention encompasses all modifications and enhancements within the scope and spirit of the present invention.